

MY WOODS.

BY JOAQUIN MILLER.

Could I but return to my woods once more,
And dwell in the depths of the forest,
Kneel in their mosses as I have knelt,
Sit where the cool white rivers run,
Away from the world and half from the sun,
Hear wind in the woods of my storm-torn shore
Glad to the heart with listening—
It seemed to me that I then could sing,
And sing as I never sang before.

I think how wholly I miss thy wood,
My childhood, magnificent dark-leaved tree
That climb up the terrible heights of flood,
Where only the breath of white heaven stirs!
Those days they are barren; wrap in storm,
Faintly masses of Titan forms,
They loom like ruins of a grandeur gone,
And someone as death to look upon.

A DREAM OF THE YEAR.

It was in one of those moods between
waking and sleeping, before rising on the
morning of the first day of the year, that
this vision passed before me, with all
the vividness of the sun, and left its im-
pression so that I can tell you what I saw
and heard.

I was walking on the bank of a deep,
broad, silent river, flowing onward to-
ward the sea. The stream was covered
with vessels of various names and rig;
all going with the current; making pro-
gress, some more, some less, but all get-
ting on. Some of these ships were so
near that I could see the men on board,
and with a little care I could discover
what each was set to do, from the mas-
ter to the cabin boy. There was enough
for all, and each vessel kept on its
course, when every man did his work
faithfully and well. There was some
bad steering and slovenly handling of
the sails, and here and there a captain
was tipsy and things were out of sort,
and one ship would run into another or
get aground; and I saw that the neglect
of any one to do his duty, made mischief
that brought trouble to all on board.

Before me in the path stood a man
whose white hair and wrinkles told me
of his great age, and even if he had not
carried a scythe over his shoulder, I
would easily have known him as Father
Time. He said to me in firm and manly
tones:

"Whither goest thou?"
"With the current," I replied; "all
things seem tending to the sea; some go
by water, some by land, and I suppose
we are all going the same way."

"Yes," he said, "and go back with
the path thou hast traveled." I
recoiled, and he spoke of the
path of human life; it is a
journey, a pilgrimage;
it is a race, a field, a battle, a service;
he said it is wrong to think of life as a
sort of space or distance between two
goals, a race to be run and then over;
a voyage to be made and then the port to
be enjoyed; and, as we walked side by
side, he discoursed to me of the duties of
life, of the works that each man has to
do, and neglecting which, he makes a
failure. We came, in our walk, upon
wrecks of vessels stranded and rotten on
the shore; by the side of the pathway,
and now and then in the very road itself,
were the remnants of broken engines,
and the rusted and mangled machinery
and the bones of human beings lying
in the grass by the wayside.

Puzzled by the sight of these things,
none of which I had noticed when
pursuing my journey alone and with
the current of the stream, I looked up
with wonder to my patriarchal guide
and asked:
"What are these wrecks that strew
the road?"

"Lost opportunities!" were the only
words that fell from his lips; but they
fell as from out of the sky, so far off, and
so solemn did they sound in my ear. I
was silent, awe-struck and anxious, for a
faint suspicion came to my mind that
this was in part my work, and these ruins
were memorials of my neglect, if nothing
worse. And I repeated his words in a
tone of respectful inquiry:

"Lost opportunities? Whose and
what, tell me, my counselor and friend?"
He paused in his walk, and removing
from his shoulder the scythe, he rested
on it, and began:

"We have gone back far enough to
learn the lesson of the day. The distance
we have walked is in time one year. The
wrecks and ruins we have passed, and
those now in sight, are the resolutions
made, the purposes formed, the works
begun, the chances enjoyed, the means
neglected, the mischief done, deeds left
unfinished, friendships lost, Sabbaths
spoiled, months run to waste, weeks
fruitless, days idled away, hours spent in
vain; each one of these lost opportuni-
ties is a wreck and skeleton on the path-
way of thy existence. Hadst thou
done thy whole duty in this one year
over which we have walked, this shat-
tered frame, now helplessly ruined,
would have been in beautiful operation,
working out a noble mission for the
good of man. Hadst thou stretched
out a hand to save this struggling fel-
low-man, or let him lean on thy shoulder,
when he was weak and thou strong for
the struggle of life, he would now be by
thy side, or if left behind, would be
praying for thee, as he pressed on toward
the mark. You have done well for
yourself, but no man lives to himself;
if he lives rightly, you may make a
long journey and at last rest from your
labor, but you will never forget these
memorials of lost opportunities that
now cry to thee from the ground."

I was cut to the heart by these words
of reproof, and, in my remorse, perhaps
inspired by that terrible allusion to the
death of Abel, I exclaimed: "Am I my
brother's keeper?"
"Certainly, thou art," he said, with

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